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SUBJECT: KOSOVO: ASSEMBLY SPEAKER PROMISES PROTOCOL SUPPORT

SENSITIVE BUT UNCLASSIFIED - PLEASE PROTECT ACCORDINGLY

¶1. (SBU) Kosovo Assembly Speaker Jakup Krasniqi, in a meeting with the Ambassador on September 9, promised his support to reduce political tensions over the EULEX-Serbia law enforcement protocol. The Ambassador thanked Krasniqi for previous public comments the Speaker made to reduce political volatility stirred up by overwrought media coverage of the protocol. Krasniqi said the issue should be settled between the Government of Kosovo (GOK) and EULEX without interference from the Assembly or the distraction of a parliamentary debate.

¶2. (SBU) The Ambassador told the Speaker that the protocol would not infringe on Kosovo's independence and sovereignty. The greater risk is that Pristina's dispute with EULEX over the protocol damages both the GOK's reputation and Kosovo's interests in European capitals. The Ambassador informed Krasniqi that we are working with the government on public messaging to dampen emotions over the protocol issue. If tensions remain high, we run the risk of roiling radicals to act out and damage Kosovo's image in Europe. Krasniqi responded that the government and EULEX should handle negotiations over the protocol between themselves and agreed to keep the subject from being debated within the Assembly. Krasniqi said he would consult with parliamentary leaders and noted approvingly that Deputy Prime Minister Kuci had already addressed two Assembly committees to present the government's position regarding the law enforcement protocol.

¶3. (U) Last week Krasniqi told media sources that the EULEX protocol would be signed and defended the agreement as necessary for EULEX to combat organized crime, smuggling, and trafficking, while furthering efforts to restore the rule of law in the North. Krasniqi is the only prominent GOK leader to date to voice support for the protocol. The Speaker, a member of Prime Minister Thaci's ruling PDK, also publicly criticized Thaci and President Sejdiu for mishandling the protocol issue.

¶4. (SBU) Comment: The EULEX protocol continues to dominate local media coverage, putting the government on the defensive. There are currently no requests from MPs to debate the issue, but last week the Assembly's Security Committee requested protocol-related documents from both the government and EULEX, a possible prelude to a full parliamentary debate. We know that Krasniqi's statesmanship on the protocol comes as an order from the Prime Minister, and the Speaker has risen to the occasion, taking a position that is politically unpopular and demonstrating good cooperation in limiting

the damage that this negotiation sideshow might cause for Kosovo's European aspirations. End Comment.

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